

## Introduction

There was no way down.

I was alone on a boulder, out of rifle shells, and surrounded by ice. Paralyzed with fear, soaked in sweat, I thought this must be what it feels like to face a firing squad.

It wasn't the smartest thing I'd ever done, heading off on my own that morning. But I was twenty-four years old, staying at a youth hostel in New Zealand, and I felt like hunting for thar, a wild mountain goat with curved horns and delicious meat. It never occurred to me to ask someone to join me or to tell the hostel staff where I was going.

I had climbed above the snow line and begun crossing a glacier. After a while, I saw a thar in the distance. I stalked and shot him, but he slid down the glacier and vaulted off a cliff into space. A moment later, the thar's fate was nearly my own as I slipped and slid off a glacier myself. I dropped about twenty feet, landing on a large boulder that was lodged precariously in the ice. I was uninjured, but I was stranded thousands of vertical feet from the ground below. I had only about two feet of boulder surface to move around on and was far enough from where I had fallen that there was no way to get back up.

I sat on the boulder for a long time. Every escape plan I could think of was too dangerous to try. But eventually, I concluded that if I stayed where I was, I was going to die. I had to do something. I had to act.

Putting the rifle sling around my neck, I looked for a spot in the boulder to grab with my hands so I could descend to the slick glacial ice below. Not a pleasant prospect, but it had to be done. As I dangled over the edge, the boulder broke free from its resting point in the ice. I started to fall, but my hands caught the lip of a depression that the boulder had formed in the ice. I hung there, getting my wits about me. Then I inched my way around and got back to the point where the boulder had sat a few minutes before. I studied the rocks on either side of my resting place.

I saw cracks in the rock wall where I could hinge my fingers, and I launched forth. I had probably gone several hundred yards when I came to a rockslide path polished slick by past slides. Below was a sheer ice cliff, thousands of feet high. It was impossible to go any farther, but somehow I did. I slid into a chute – which should have been the end of me, but my foot happened to catch on a crack, and I was able to edge my way across the chute.

Looking back at the places I had just traversed, I was overcome with a sense of relief and a belief that this was not my day to die. A calm settled over me, a mystical clearing of fear. I felt cool and confident, now quite comfortable taking extreme risks. I jumped easily from point to point, like a monkey in the jungle. As I made my way down, I gleefully teetered on pointed rocks without using my hands at all.

There were still challenges ahead, but I met them with new resolve. Facing another vertical ice wall, I used my rifle barrel as an ax and carved steps I could walk on for several hundred yards. That gave me the idea to use the rifle barrel on rock face too, creating divots to ease my descent. The rifle – now with a bent barrel – would never again do what it was intended to, but it helped me survive when I needed it.

As the sun lowered on the horizon, it lit up the mountain slopes. At last, I could see the bottom and the safety it represented. I noticed a golden glint on the rocks. As I got closer, I realized it was the thar I had

killed earlier that day. And although not many hours had passed since I shot the animal, it had been an eternity in life experience and what I had learned about myself.

I begin this book about my life with the story of the tar because it represents my belief that a well-lived life is one filled with lessons learned. Sixty years ago on that icy mountain, I had learned a lot. Choose life over fear. Use whatever tools you have to survive, especially your own mind. Remember that you are more resourceful than you think. And never again forget to prepare ahead for the awesome power of nature.

In my opinion, there are three different kinds of life lessons: the ones you learn yourself—like my mountain adventure; the ones you learn from others; and the ones you learn from great books. My life has been rich in all three. And I have found that as these lessons enhance and build on one another, life grows continually more interesting and satisfying.



*Sharing my love of nature with Megan and Tyler.*

My hope is that this book offers readers some lessons of the second kind – ones learned from others. In this case, from me. Lessons like how to travel the world on your own and on a budget. When to stand your ground and when to compromise. How to turn your back on a life that's wrong for you and discover the life you should be living. How to fight hard but learn from your adversaries. How to find renewal and sustenance in nature. And how to tie a knot.

I often think about the leather-bound books that line the shelves of law firms. They contain centuries of legal knowledge, landmark lawsuits, and historic precedents, providing attorneys with the tools they need to make widespread social change through the courts. I think environmentalists need something similar, an archive of the methods and strategies that successful activists have used to make groundbreaking environmental change – so the next generation won't have to start at square one every time they take on a new challenge.

I want to start that ball rolling. That's why my book includes so many stories of how I and the people I worked with over the years have found ways to make sweeping environmental change. Like establishing the United Nations Environment Programme. Sharing the concept of Greenplanning with governments around the world. And preserving millions of acres of wilderness as public lands, including Hawaii's Seven Sacred Pools and twelve hundred miles of wild California rivers and streams. In every case, there was a method to our madness, a method that may help others in their work to reverse climate change, protect our oceans, or preserve wildlife habitat.